



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 17, 2005**, in room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry
Ann E. Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Jason Anderson
William Johnson

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Helen A. Kleinberg
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Stacey F. Winkler

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the October 17, 2005, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the October 3, 2005, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Vice Chair Rudnick, chairing the meeting in the absence of Chair Kleinberg, welcomed new youth representatives Jason Anderson and William Johnson. The Commission looks forward to working with them both.
- A press release regarding National Adoption month in November was included in Commissioner packets.
- Information was distributed on the November 10 conference, *A New Beginning for Partnerships for Children & Families in Los Angeles County*, and Commissioners were urged to attend.

ALTERNATIVE USES FOR MACLAREN CHILDREN'S CENTER FUNDS

Departmental budget officer Tito Barin reviewed a breakdown of the net county cost for alternative uses of MacLaren Children's Center funds following the closing of that facility. Items not originally budgeted in fiscal year 2003–2004, but added in subsequent years, included costs for:

- Caseload reduction, following the abandonment of the plan to establish family reception and conferencing centers
- Case management services to 508 children who would have been placed in MacLaren had the facility remained open
- Short-term emergency placements for children who would have been briefly placed at MacLaren
- The Katie A. panel

Additional transfers were made from MacLaren funds into the regular departmental budget for transitional housing assistance payments, the medical HUBs and their expansion, specialized foster care mental health services, and Probation staff on the wrap-around interagency screening teams. (Because the dollars under discussion are net county cost, the state did not have to approve budget changes.)

The permanency teams—noted as 'to be dissolved'—derived from the Katie A. settlement, and were part of a joint plan with the Department of Mental Health. They are not connected to Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63) funds. Mr. Barin promised to provide information on where children are going when group homes issue seven-day notices and where they are sent for emergency placement, and will also obtain the number of staff that are currently being housed at the MacLaren facility. The pension bond cost associated with MacLaren staff is an estimate, since it cannot be discretely broken out from similar costs for the entire department.

Commissioner Curry expressed her concern about expenditures for caseload reduction coming out of MacLaren funds, since she believes those monies should be spent on services for older MacLaren type youth who are now transitioning out of the system. More than just transitional housing services—some need connections to Regional Centers, adult mental health services, etc.—and she would like to see funds transferred to those

efforts. Commissioner Williams agreed, noting that reductions in caseloads should eventually mean more dollars for high-end children. Commissioner Curry also emphasized the importance of tracking the number of emancipating teens each year, to discover whether in fact that number is decreasing. Vice Chair Rudnick asked Helen Berberian to obtain that information, and also requested that she pass along Commissioner Curry's suggestion to direct more funds to services for emancipating teens.

Commissioner Williams asked if the significant amount of MacLaren money allocated to wraparound services is being used effectively and if the number of children needing those services is being reduced. Trish Ploehn, deputy director for Service Bureau 1, agreed that an evaluation of wraparound is due to see if the program is working and how many children can be served with the available funds. Vice Chair Rudnick asked that a presentation to the Commission on wraparound services be scheduled.

PROGRESS OF DCFS INITIATIVES

Ms. Ploehn drew Commissioners' attention to the three fact sheets in their packets, on wraparound services, adoptions, and the medical HUBs. She then reviewed a spreadsheet showing the implementation progress of various initiatives within each service bureau, as well as in the office of the medical director.

Overall departmental outcomes are to increase child safety, reduce timelines to permanency, and reduce reliance on out-of-home care. To achieve them, the department is using five strategies: point of engagement, concurrent planning, the Permanency Partners Program (P3), structured decision-making, and team decision-making. As the spreadsheet shows, team decision-making is fully implemented, as is structured decision-making (except in adoptions, where it is not used). The only two offices still awaiting P3 staff are service programs inside of other offices—the medical placement, American Indian, and deaf services units. Concurrent planning is still in the pilot stage but is seen as successful; a tentative agreement has been reached with the unions to prepare additional offices for the rollout, which is anticipated early next year. The rollout plan for point of engagement, which also began as a pilot, calls for it to be fully implemented by the spring of 2006.

The spreadsheet further shows the numbers of open cases or referrals in each office by program: family maintenance and voluntary family maintenance, family reunification and voluntary family reunification, permanency planning, and emergency response. In voluntary programs, staff work with families to ensure child safety in the least intrusive manner possible, without a court order. Voluntary family reunification was common 20 years ago, when families having difficulties would ask the department to take children temporarily. That practice ceased some time back, but has recently returned. At the end of five months, either a plan must be in place for the child to return home, or a case must be filed with the court. The spreadsheet's voluntary family reunification column shows the number of children currently in that five- to six-month window.

The figures on supporting spreadsheets, Ms. Ploehn said, provide program details. In permanency planning, for instance, 992 participating children are not in out-of-home care. Some are AWOL, but the majority have already gone home. For them to continue

receiving services, their cases must be carried in the program for 90 days. A departmental work group has been established to address this issue.

In general, family maintenance cases are up, and permanency planning and family reunification cases are down. With the integration of point of engagement and concurrent planning, these trends are expected to continue. The department is well aware that it cannot achieve its goals by itself, and is involving the community in wrapping supports and services around families. Commissioner Curry praised the effort that went into gathering this data, suggesting an additional column in the summary spreadsheet indicating the percentage of each office's caseload in each program category, to facilitate comparisons. Ms. Ploehn noted that because of its location, the Lakewood office is assigned the cases of children placed in adjacent counties, which increases its raw numbers.

Eric Marts, regional administrator in Compton, outlined that area's success with point of engagement because of community involvement and giving parents a say in case planning. Child safety conferences often include pastors, neighbors, parole officers, and other community partners, while numerous agencies help assess children and provide linkages to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence services, food and clothing banks, mentoring, and so on. Families evaluated out by the hotline without a child abuse investigation are referred to community agencies through the Path One pilot, and AmeriCorps volunteers work with agencies and families on unfounded referrals. County partners are equally helpful, particularly on the multidisciplinary assessment teams, and the Department of Public Social Services regularly sends eligibility workers to child safety conferences. To sustain prevention efforts, Mr. Marts would like to see social workers outstationed in schools and police stations.

Harvey Kawasaki, regional administrator in Torrance, outlined the challenges of the diverse population within the large SPA 8 area, stretching from Inglewood to the southern beach cities and the Palos Verdes peninsula. His office has forged a strong relationship with the SPA 8 Council, co-sponsoring a series of school readiness conferences and becoming involved in other regional initiatives. With a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, it also created the South Bay Community Partnership Council, which meets monthly and is working to establish a mentoring program (already underway) and a sibling center, to be piloted in Inglewood, that will wrap community resources around sibling groups to keep them together and in their communities. Participation on the partnership council has been enthusiastic, with members connecting to numerous organizations that offer everything from suitcases for foster children to hand-made quilts for infants.

Another emphasis in the Torrance office has been involving the community in occasions such as a September 13 community appreciation event, co-sponsored by the SPA 8 Council and the community partnership. A 90-minute caregiver forum following that event spurred the scheduling of a follow-up meeting with representatives from other county departments, which will happen at the November 5 school readiness conference. Commissioner Williams asked that any notes or minutes from those forums—and those from any other groups meeting to discuss similar issues—be sent to the Commission.

A South Bay mentor coalition is also being created, beginning with a December 7 round-table discussion on standards, resources to be leveraged, and organizations to engage in recruitment. At a Day of the Child event yesterday at Pierce College, 1,148 DCFS children spent a day with a matched mentor, and Mr. Kawasaki is proposing a similar event in the South Bay to coincide with National Mentors' Month in January. A unit in the Torrance office that offers resources to youth 15½ and older—Life and Emancipation skills Aimed at Permanency and Self-sufficiency (LEAPS)—will be involved. Commissioner Curry encouraged Mr. Kawasaki to include public housing in the mentoring event, and also to be aware of the challenges inherent in retaining mentors for the long term. He said that part of the coalition's approach will be to look at alternative strategies for mentoring relationships, including tutoring and workforce apprenticeships.

When asked about monolingual Spanish-speaking parents within his region, Mr. Kawasaki said that his staff more than adequately addresses their needs, and that the community partnership has not expressed any lack of services in that regard. Dana Blackwell inquired about resources still missing in different areas, and Mr. Marts reported that a recent youth focus group in the Compton schools had identified transportation within the community as an urgent need. Gang activity is so prevalent that youth must often cross several different gang territories to attend worksource programs or recreational activities. If they have to travel on foot, they don't go. Mr. Marts is currently working with a local interfaith council to provide a fleet of vans to get youth to where resources are available.

Mr. Kawasaki said that ongoing mental health services for youth over 18 and dual-diagnosis children (developmentally delayed, severely emotionally disturbed, etc.) are an special need. Meetings are ongoing with his region's mental health liaison and with one of its two Regional Centers to get beyond "the battle of the bureaucracies" and engage in constructive communication. Commissioner Curry again stressed the use of MacLaren Children's Center funds for this population. She agreed with Mr. Kawasaki that the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) monies might also be used, but emphasized that those funds must serve a lot of children. In the MHSA plan approved by the Board of Supervisors, adults received the largest allocation and transition-aged youth the smallest.

Mr. Kawasaki is talking with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) about the co-location of staff; failing co-location, he would like to arrange for dedicated DPSS staff to deal with the concerns of caregivers. Ms. Ploehn said that a state program in which DPSS and DCFS are participating is looking at their shared client base and how to better share information. DCFS plans to move toward hosting DPSS staff in its offices and including them in team decision-making.

Paul Buehler, regional administrator in Lancaster, reported that the family-to-family initiative has been fully implemented there over the last year, as has structured decision-making; team decision-making is used for all new referrals. The Antelope Valley is isolated, but residents are eager to be involved. Work groups with extensive community membership report to the SPA 1 Council and other community stakeholders on a monthly basis, and are guided by a centralized coordinating team that makes decisions. Despite

partnerships with private agencies offering substance abuse and other programs, gaps in services still exist for adults. (Mr. Marts echoed this need for his region.)

Commissioner Curry recommended that regional administrators become involved with the Department of Mental Health's Service Area Councils (SACs), which had a tremendous voice in the process of allocating MHSA monies. Mr. Kawasaki regularly attends SAC meetings, and has addressed them regarding point of engagement and permanency initiatives. Though Mr. Marts does not attend SAC meetings, he does meet regularly with mental health agencies to discuss capacity and service offerings.

Ms. Ploehn reviewed the adoptions fact sheet distributed to Commissioners, which detailed the numbers of children now in the various stages of the adoption process. In the past, a child's case was transferred to the adoptions division and a social worker there took care of each step, but this caused delays. With the advent of concurrent planning, cases stay with regional social workers, and adoptions staff can do their work more efficiently. The recent push toward permanency has increased the need for adoptive homes for sibling groups, older youth, and children with special issues, and the department is exploring new ways to recruit families open to adopting those children.

Commissioner Ma asked for a breakdown of children in each adoption stage by age, and also wanted to know how many were being adopted by relatives. Commissioner Curry raised the question of children returned from adoptive homes, and Ms. Ploehn said that tracking those children was difficult because of changes in surnames, addresses, and other information. Unless adoptive families self-identify, they are not flagged.

Sari Grant from the adoptions division, reported on the activities planned for National Adoption Month in November, which include:

- National Adoption Day on November 19, when judges from all over the county will appear at the Children's Court to finalize 210 adoptions
- A November 3 breakfast hosted by Supervisor Antonovich to engage faith-based leaders in recruiting adoptive families (similar to one previously hosted by Supervisor Burke), and a November 16 Latino Outreach breakfast for Latino leaders
- The launch of two programs to connect children waiting for adoption to faith-based communities—Church Families for Waiting Children, for African-American adoptees, and the Church Mentor Program
- The launch of Kidsave Weekend Miracles, a program in which waiting children visit host families for weekends
- The November 5 kick-off for Heart Gallery Los Angeles, a portrait exhibition of prospective adoptees that is expected to travel through various shopping centers
- Special coverage on Channel 11 and a major media campaign on three radio stations
- Booths at community events; posters, bumper stickers, license plate frames, and sunshields available to county employees; and flyers promoting adoption included in county employee pay stubs, and mailed to families who have previously adopted

Older children who say they don't want to be adopted often don't understand the full impact of what they are refusing, and staff are working to transition reluctant youth into programs that may help them consider adoption. Adoption specialist teams also work with these children, and the department is thinking about expanding that program.

For children who cannot make a match in other ways, four adoption fairs are held each year; the next is a Latino Fiesta on December 3. Youth representative Jason Anderson said that, especially for reluctant youth, establishing contact with prospective families could be a good thing, to give them an opportunity to explore the idea of adoption. William Johnson cautioned against the emotional fall-out of perceived rejection for children who don't find a match, and who feel they are not being accepted for who they are. Follow-up is also crucial, he said, since youth may talk to one family extensively but then never hear from them again. Ms. Grant acknowledged these concerns, and explained that when adoptive families are not found, staff emphasize that it isn't about the child not being good enough—it is the department's responsibility to find an appropriate match.

Commissioner Williams asked if everything is being done in the adoptions process to connect again with relatives and find additional ways to persuade them to consider legal guardianship. Ideally, Ms. Grant said, permanency partners should be thoroughly explored prior to the case reaching the adoptions division; however, P3 didn't exist for most of the children currently waiting. Sometimes relatives cannot care for the child themselves, but can help recruit adoptive parents, and many unrelated families are happy to have biological relatives continue to be involved in the child's life.

Ms. Blackwell asked about recruiting resource families, and Ms. Grant will provide current numbers. All families are trained and certified as both foster parents and adoptive parents, and staff tries to sort them into those willing to immediately provide a permanent home, those willing to consider it, and those who are not interested in permanent arrangement. If children are unlikely to reunify with their own families, they are placed with families more likely to adopt—which many foster parents end up doing.

Matches for the Kidsave Weekend Miracles program will begin at the end of October, and visits will start in January. Children will remain living at their foster homes but spend two weekends a month with their host families, to be introduced to those communities. The hope is that foster parents will engage with host families, with social workers monitoring that progress. A small monthly matching fair is planned, and children will attend a support group once a month. In Fairfax County, Virginia, the pilot program served children from other countries, many of whom were adopted by their host families.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no request for public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED